



# REDEMPTION

MAKING MUCH OF JESUS

Philippians 3:12-21

*Soli Deo Gloria*

11/16/2020 - 11/22/2020

## MAIN POINT

Every Christian ought to be looking to heaven, longing for heaven, and living for heaven.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**If you had to pick one thing, what would you say is your priority in life? How do your choices reinforce that priority? What are the priorities of people living in our culture today?**

**How do our culture's priorities compare with the church's?**

In our text today, Paul uses the language of the athletic contest to express his thoughts. Though he was continually pressing toward the goal of complete maturity in Christ, he did not feel that he had reached it. Paul spoke in the language of hope. These verses represent one of the most profound statements on the priority of the Christian life found anywhere in the New Testament.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14.

**Using the imagery of a track race, where does Paul picture himself in his spiritual life? What prize is he after? Look back at 3:10 to help you answer.**

**What are some examples of things Christians today need to leave behind from their past (v. 13)? How has God helped you leave behind things in your past?**

**What does it mean to be Christlike (v. 14)? What does that look like in everyday life in the family, at work, or around the neighborhood?**

Paul now had a new goal toward which he was looking and running—the goal of becoming like Christ, which Paul described as spiritual maturity. Mature Christians humbly strive for more intimacy with Christ while at the same time relying on the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian life.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:15-16.

**What is God's role in transforming us into the image of Christ? What is our role?**

**Why is it important for us as Christians to put into practice the truths we learn about God and about the Christian life? Share an example from your life.**

**What experiences and disciplines help Christians mature (v. 15)? What obstacles prevent believers from growing in maturity?**

Paul concluded that the spiritually mature among the Philippian believers should agree with him and consider themselves to be in the process of growing toward Christlikeness. In effect, he insisted that mature believers would be aware of their incomplete maturity. As Christ followers, our focus in life can't be on our failures or our "good works." Giving either too much attention keeps us from growing in our faith and maturity as believers. Instead we must look ahead, longing and living for heaven.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:17-19.

**Think about a person you look to as a pattern for Christian living or a person who has played a part in your Christian growth. What characteristics of that person have you tried to imitate?**

**Is your life such that someone could look to you as a model? Why or why not?**

On more than one occasion in his letters, Paul called his readers to imitate him. Paul did not make this demand in an egotistical way; he simply was letting his readers know that he had given them a pattern by which to live. By imitating Paul, believers would be living the life Christ wanted them to live. Paul was pleading for the Philippians and others to give priority to faithfully serving Christ.

**What was the point of Paul's warning in verses 18-19? How did this relate to imitating Paul's example of serving Christ?**

**Paul described those who live for themselves as "enemies of the cross of Christ" (v. 18). Is that a fair judgment? Why or why not? Why do you think Paul made such a bold claim?**

Paul became quite emotional as he warned his readers against false teachers. Paul was moved to tears when he thought of those false teachers who were corrupting the true gospel of Christ. Undoubtedly these false teachers were claiming to be followers of Christ. However, their doctrine was not in keeping with the true gospel Paul preached. Rather than center their lives on heavenly or spiritual values, truths, and goals, they were focused on earthly (material) things. They consistently pursued material things as their priority.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21.

**What does "heavenly citizenship" mean? How does being a citizen of God's kingdom impact your daily life?**

**What do verses 20-21 tell us about the goal of spiritual growth—of God's work in our lives? How does this goal motivate you to pursue Christ today?**

By focusing on what God can do in the present and will do in the future, our perspective and priorities change. We no longer need to find our happiness, joy, and satisfaction in things of this world. We see that God is busy transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. Living for Him will lead to living like Him.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What Christian disciplines are helping you make progress toward spiritual maturity? What evidence indicates that you are making progress in your struggle toward maturity?**

**What habits and behavioral patterns identify you as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven?**

**What do you look forward to the most when you think about eternity?**

**How does the priority you give to serving Christ faithfully give evidence that you are living for heaven?**

# PRAYER

Thank God for the freedom from sin and death available to believers in Christ through the gospel and for the hope you have that one day this transformation will be complete.

## COMMENTARY

### | PHILIPPIANS 3:12-21

3:12. Paul's description of his desires pointed forward to a goal. Not yet mature, he was still very much in the race of the Christian life. The perfection he would have at the future resurrection was not yet attained. He still had to deal with what in Romans 7 he calls "the flesh," an innate pull to sin. He had to deal with his sinful body and was only too aware of the need for further spiritual growth. He purposes to press on as he had not attained the intense personal knowledge of Christ that he desired and had not become all that Christ wanted him to be. Paul always held God up as the source of every part of the salvation experience.

3:13. Paul, in verse 13, underlines his denial of personal power or attainment and his single-minded focus. To describe that focus, he employs the image of a runner in a race who hopes to win the prize. He cannot look back. He cannot cloud his mind with past memories. He strains every muscle in his body to achieve forward motion. Eyes focus on the finish line. Paul forgets the guilt of persecuting the church. He forgets the pain of prison and physical punishment. He forgets the frustration of disobedient church members and false teachers. He looks ahead to see the resurrection, where he will meet Jesus face-to-face.

3:14. With this focus he pursues his goal intently (v. 14). His goal is to win the prize for which God had called him in Christ Jesus. He wants to hear God call his name and summon him to the victory stand, where he will meet Jesus face-to-face and know Him in perfect intimacy. Earthly prizes do not last. Eternal prizes do. The goal can never be realized on earth. It is a goal that pulls us heavenward. Note 1 Corinthians 9:25: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." While Paul was not spiritually where he thought he would ultimately be, he intended not to be distracted by anything as he pursued his goal (Heb. 12:1-2). Both discipline and determination are required to accomplish this objective.

3:15. Paul believed that all spiritually mature Christians would agree with or would share his philosophy toward life (v. 15). Mature translates the same Greek term as did perfect in verse 12. Paul pointed to a difference of opinion as to the meaning of perfection. His opponents thought

they had obeyed the law and achieved perfection in this life. Paul knew he would never obtain perfection. The only persons who could claim to be part of the “perfect ones” were those who knew that running the race and seeking the goal was the only mark of perfection possible on earth. If they thought differently, Paul was confident God could cause them to change their minds, since Paul’s human arguments could not. Paul was content to shed some light on the subject.

3:16. As followers of Christ, we are responsible to live out or put into practice what we have learned (v. 16). We are not perfect, but that is no excuse not to run the race and seek the prize. God is calling us to the victory stand. We must run as hard as we can to cross the finish line.

3:17. Paul urged his brothers in Christ to join in imitating him (v. 17). He was not bragging or holding himself up as the perfect model; yet he was the best example of Christ’s follower they had. He urged the Philippian believers to fix their attention on believers who were following his example. The Philippian Christians were to pattern their lifestyles after Paul and other believers who imitated him—all of whom were following Christ’s model.

3:18. With deep emotion, Paul warned his friends against enemies of the cross of Christ (v. 18). Paul described these enemies as unbelievers and wept because of their tragic condition and their negative effect on others in the church. They were enemies of the cross because their lifestyles contradicted their professed commitment to Christ.

3:19. Paul declared that these pseudo-Christians were headed for destruction—that is, ruin in the sense of eternal separation from God (v. 19). Though they professed to worship God, they had made an idol of their stomach, a term for the wide range of their sensual (bodily) appetites. Their self-indulgence contrasted sharply to Christ’s sacrificial self-giving. Rather than center their lives on heavenly or spiritual values, truths, and goals, the professing Christians were focused on earthly (material) things. The Greek term rendered are focused on means “to set the mind on,” “to be intent on,” and conveys continuous action. They consistently pursued material things as their priority.

3:20. In contrast, genuine believers’ citizenship is in heaven (v. 20). Paul maintained that Christians were (and are) members of two realms. They were citizens of the Roman Empire and should be exemplary citizens. More important, they were citizens of God’s kingdom and owed their primary loyalty to God. Their heavenly citizenship governed their earthly lives. Paul emphasized the creative tension in which believers lived: they eagerly awaited the return of Christ their Savior. Paul’s emphasis may have been on the fulfillment or culmination of Christians’ salvation at that time or their being delivered from persecution.

3:21. Christ has supernatural power to subject everything to Himself (v. 21). He is sovereign. With such unlimited effective energy, Christ will transform believers' bodies when He returns. The Greek word translated transform has the idea of changing something so it conforms to something else. The body of our humble condition is the physical body. The phrase His glorious body refers to the Lord's spiritual or resurrection body appropriate for eternity. Christ will change believers' bodies to be like His, not merely in external appearance but also in essential nature. Believers will reach full maturity.